The Technology of Transcendence: Robert Monroe's Hemi-Sync Tapes

By Marta Vogel

Washington, D.C., psychiatrist used Hemi-Sync tapes to help an alcoholic patient stop drinking and make changes in his (the patient's) personal life. A Madison, Wisconsin, speech-language pathologist says an autistic child showed remarkable improvement after listening to the tapes. Others report success with depression and life changes that resisted other therapeutic approaches.

With technology now wedded to transcendence, the 1/8-inch tape on stereo headphones is fast becoming a therapist's most valuable new tool. The altered state of consciousness produced by the Hemi-Sync tapes promises to open up the brain to an uncritical, non-analytical fashion so that, as Susan Evans Morris, a speech-language pathologist says, "information leading to a change in self-concept would become more available; modification of habitual behaviors or consideration of one's belief system could occur more easily. . . ."

At the helm of using technology to break through the barriers of the mind is Robert Monroe, founder of the Monroe Institute. The Faber, Virginia Institute, where 1,200-1,500 people a year take programs in expanding awareness, is dedicated to the idea that "focused consciousness, contains all solutions to the questions of human existence." How we attain focused consciousness and through what methods we open ourselves to its lessons are the on-going Institute aims.

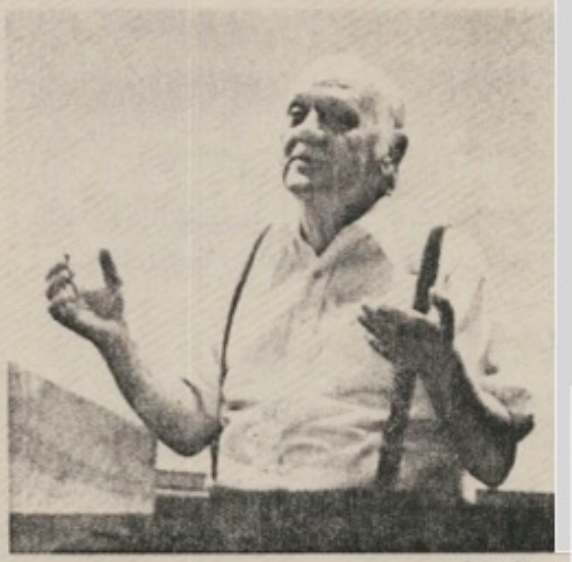
An integral part of Monroe's technology is his Hemi-Sync sound tapes. Having acquired the patent in 1975 for "psycho-physical entrainment via sound patterns," Monroe has built his work on the belief that certain sound patterns create a Frequency Following Response (FFR) in the electrical activity of the brain. Those sound patterns then lead the brain into an "appropriate state," such as deep relaxation or sleep. When separate signals are fed into each ear via the headphones, the two hemispheres of the brain, according to Monroe, "act in unison to 'hear' a third signal—the difference between the two sound pulses. This third signal is not an actual sound, but an electrical signal that can only be created by both brain hemispheres acting and working together, simultaneously"—hence the term "Hemi-Synchronization," Hemi-Sync, for short.

Jack Bruns, a Charlestown, Indiana, therapist and former Baptist minister, says, "My purpose in using them with therapy is to open that bridge between left and right hemispheres and between the subconscious and the conscious. Hemi-Sync helps unjam subconscious blockages."

Psychiatrist Paul Travis and his wife, psychologist, Marion Travis, have been intrigued with the idea of helping alcoholics deal with anxiety and alcohol. They report success when clients listen to Hemi-Sync tapes twice a day. One man in his early thirties who drank excessively and was on heavy drugs noticed changes almost immediately after using the High-Performance tapes. As many people report, he had trouble describing the change in words, but the more he used the tapes—every day for a month—the more effective he was in dealing with his problems.

"Listening to the Hemi-Sync Surf," notes psychologist Ed Levy, "puts patients into a frame of mind most suited to letting go and to focusing on a new program in their life. . . ." It also helps them "forget past and present problems and their environment; and concentrate utterly on the desired physical and mental conditions they want."

Monroe says that individuals can tap wasted potential of the brain by putting themselves in an optimal state of consciousness. (The brain states consist of 1) Beta—alert, focused, problem solving, analytic; 2) Alpha—alert but unfocused; 3) Theta—very relaxed, optimal learning state; and 4) Delta—deep sleep, unconscious.) Theta, says Monroe, is the "slipperiest" of the four EEG ranges. The only time most of us are in theta is during the hypnogogic state—on the way into sleep—and during the hypnopompic state—the way out of sleep. Listening to only a theta signal often results in sliding right down into delta—sleep. To prevent this, a beta signal is superimposed on the theta, which brings about relaxed alertness.



Robert Monroe

The Hemi-Sync cassettes involve different types of frequencies, depending on the desired state of activity—"passive" cassettes designed so that patients can comfortably relax or go to sleep, and "active" cassettes to help patients concentrate and assist the process of self-healing.

Playing Hemi-Sync tapes before or during many kinds of activities seems to enhance them.

"It doesn't 'hurt' as much to use the brain," says Jerry McWhinney, former school psychologist, now learning therapist at the National Learning Lab in Bethesda, Maryland. People who are given number series problems (2,4,6,8, what's the next number?) after listening to Hemi-Sync "are more persistent and more persevering," notes McWhinney. Other Hemi-Sync users report vision improvement, improved concentration and problem solving.

But almost all those who have used Hemi-Sync urge caution. Marion Travis says if done under careful supervision the tapes will help patients "work through their own problems," but warns that it's important to prepare patients for the possibilities that deep relaxation can uncover, such as long suppressed anxieties.

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"Don't rush," says Travis, "and always monitor the patient; always be there. Tell them, 'I'm here. If you feel uncomfortable, take the earphones off.' You have to work with your patients and know exactly where they are. I never thought any of my patients were able to do it themselves."

THE HEMI-SYNC SYNTHESIZER

Designed to further improve the learning capabilities of students with tapes, the Hemi-Sync Synthesizer is a $400 electronic machine which produces Hemi-Sync signals and automatically mixes them with music or other material from an external tape recorder. This composite sound is then amplified and played over external speakers or stereo headphones. The operator can choose settings of relaxation (theta mixed with delta), possibly for children who have come in from play and need to settle down to an intellectual task; imaging (theta) used in guided imagery;

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attention focusing (theta mixed with delta and beta) for optimal cognitive learning; and imaging and attention (theta mixed with beta) for arousing students who have become drowsy during a long imaging session or for learning geometry, music, theory and foreign languages.

"Some people say, 'Is that machine on? I'm feeling strange,' " says McWhinney, who says *he* can tell when the machine is on because "there's something in the auditory air."

McWhinney speculates that for some people the first experience with the synthesizer may have a kind of "detoxifying" effect, and thus, may be negative. "It's hard to say what precisely is effecting an individual. But the more accustomed to it I became, the more pleasant it was as far as creativity and productivity."

Bruns, who is authoring *The Christian and the Psychic World*, says that contrary to the idea that one becomes addicted to the tapes, "clients can drop into theta state without the tapes afterwhile. It's sort of like working on a word processor for the first time. At first you look at the instructions, then you don't need to anymore."

"When the distractions come along," notes McWhinney, "the mind/body kicks into that which you felt *with* the tapes; it's a kind of conditioned response."

McWhinney found one of the "disadvantages" of Hemi-Sync to be a kind of post-listening after-glow.

"My experience and that of my clients is that, initially, 35 to 45 minutes afterwards, it's difficult to perform linear, left-brain functions," he says. "But once you are reoriented, things are clearer and you are able to concentrate longer and filter out distracting stimuli."

Monroe Institute Director, Nancy McMoneagle warns that "you have to learn how to bring yourself out of it," and that verbal guidance and other "grounding techniques" help.

Future directions for the Institute, according to McMoneagle, include design of a "sleep restorative trainer" which would help you sleep all night and wake up on cue, and an "enhanced Hemi-Synchronizer" with more combinations of sounds, specifically geared to therapists. The present system only allows four combinations of consciousness states while the new one will have combinations of frequencies, for example, a therapist could dial theta and alpha for a relaxed but alert state if the therapist wanted to make suggestions for behavior changes. The new synchronizer will also have a built-in microphone so the therapist can simultaneously talk over the tapes. The Institute is also concentrating on trying to support anecdotal reports with statistical evidence.

Notes McWhinney, "Hemi-Sync is one of the most exciting and revolutionary ways to increase our own creativity and our way of being." And according to Brother Charles, Executive Director of the MSH Association in Faber, Virginia and another pioneer of whole brain synchronization: "By the year 2000, expansion of consciousness will be at the flip of a switch. We will achieve what had taken us hours with beads, and mantras and sore knees." ■

Marta Vogel is a Takoma Park, Maryland, writer who wrote this piece using the Hemi-Sync concentration tape. For more information on Monroe's tapes and programs, write: The Monroe Institute, Rte. 1, Box 175, Faber, VA 22938-9749. Or call: (804) 361-1252.